

**20<sup>TH</sup> ASIA SECURITY SUMMIT**  
**THE SHANGRI-LA DIALOGUE**

OPENING REMARKS

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Welcome to the 20th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue or SLD. It is a delight for all of us at the International Institute for Strategic Studies to be convening this Asia security summit for the 20th time. I remember well at the turn of this century, examining the range of latent and prospective geopolitical tensions in the Asia-Pacific region, being struck by the fact that in this region, presidents met, prime ministers met, finance ministers met, foreign ministers met, but there was no established forum for defence ministers to convene multilaterally.

Having noticed this gap in the defence-diplomatic marketplace, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) chose not to write a worthy academic article deploring the absence of a regional security institution and recommending that somehow it emerge and take form. Instead, we decided to seek support to create it ourselves.

The IISS had held one of its annual conferences for members in Singapore in the late 1990s. Strategic thinking was a globally recognised special quality of this remarkable city state. It made sense to consult here. Following conversations I had with President SR Nathan and Defence Minister Tony Tan, I was warmly encouraged to proceed. And when I discussed my idea of a defence ministers' meeting in Singapore with Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the guidance I received from the then senior minister was characteristically crisp and challenging: well, give it a go.

And so it was that at the end of May 2002, in the middle of a major crisis between India and Pakistan that some feared could even turn into a nuclear conflict, the IISS convened 14 defence ministers and 160 delegates for the first Asia security summit in Singapore. Some asked me why we called it the Shangri-La Dialogue. The answer is this: when I was discussing organising this unprecedented and sensitive defensive event in Asia with a friend, we both agreed that Asia Security Summit sounded perhaps a bit harsh, a bit too sharp, even a bit too edgy. We needed something softer.

As we were mulling over this diabolical marketing dilemma, he asked me, well, where are you holding it? I said, the Shangri-La Hotel. There it is, he replied. Call it the Shangri-La Summit. That will sound better. I replied, that's an excellent improvement, though we don't want just to arrive at a summit, we want to facilitate useful conversations, help meetings to take place, create some back and forth between ministers and other delegates. I then made my counter-suggestion: how about Shangri-La Dialogue then? We smiled to each other in immediate mutual self-satisfied accord, and thus was born the best sponsorship agreement that a think tank has ever freely and unilaterally offered to a major international hotel chain.

Over the years, the SLD has provided the platform for several bilateral and multilateral arrangements to be devised or signed at the Dialogue and has inspired modernised and even new forms of defence cooperation and confidence building. In 2005, four countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand – agreed combined maritime air patrols to complement sea patrols in the Malacca Straits, which continue today. After Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in May 2008, ministers and military chiefs meeting at the SLD made important advances in determining the conditions by which humanitarian aid could be delivered to the people of Myanmar in a manner that was acceptable to the then government. Prior to the SLD's creation, the Five Power Defence Arrangements, or FPDA, had fallen into partial disrepair. But with the defence ministers of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia, all regularly attending the SLD, it became easy to refresh and revive the FPDA for contemporary purposes.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) defence ministers attended the SLD from the start in 2002, and it was pleasing that in 2006 the first formal ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)

took place in Kuala Lumpur. Four years later, in 2010, the inaugural ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), including ASEAN's eight dialogue partners, also convened. The comfort levels earlier achieved at the SLD surely provided the incentives for the creation of these new formal institutions.

The Shangri-La Dialogue will always take advantage of its informal character to allow some experimentation in the diversity of participants and the structure of the event to keep it fresh and at the forefront of strategic debate. The IISS has no agenda of its own in convening this Dialogue other than to create the best possible environment for engagements both public and discreet, and to inject useful freshness into the strategic debate.

This is not an international-relations conference; it's a defence ministers' gathering, where questions of strategy are properly front and centre. Balance of power, arms control, alliance relationships, emerging technologies in doctrines of warfare, confidence-building measures, international law, national interest and international stability are the inevitable key reference points. An important goal everyone here shares is to imagine and then create the conditions for strategic stability.

Looking back, many rightly in this region are critical of the acrimony and rivalries that characterised the Cold War. Millions of people in many regions suffered because of that long Cold War. There was plenty of Cold War thinking to which we must never return. But not all Cold War thinking was bad. During the Cold War, the principles of mutual nuclear deterrence were developed that helped to prevent the actual use of those weapons. The complex units of account for nuclear arms control were formulated that helped to maintain an agreed balance of power, and arrangements for transparency and confidence building were institutionalised to facilitate diplomacy and to avoid unhappy military surprises between opponents.

Despite the huge differences between the competing state systems, periods of detente were found and channels for strategic dialogue were maintained. Any stable security environment needs to find a place for these instruments of strategic peacekeeping, even if importantly adapted to different circumstances and regions. The Indo-Pacific security order is delicately poised. We are genuinely proud and frankly relieved that so many of you carrying those responsibilities are present.

Spontaneity is rarely a prized feature of traditional diplomacy, but the opportunity provided here for unscripted exchanges or unprepared meetings, we hope, might still bear fruit. An accidental diplomatic encounter is better than an accidental military incident. Quite properly, leaders coming to this region are keenly aware of the need to acknowledge ASEAN centrality in the field of defence diplomacy. At least for one hardworking weekend in the year, I hope that we are permitted to pay decent tribute to Shangri-La Dialogue centrality.

Acting Prime Minister Wong, Singapore government ministers and senior officials, would you please accept the thanks of the IISS and all the international delegates gathered here for being such superb hosts and custodians of the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue process over 20 years.

Let me now move speedily to our keynote address. There are personal reasons why it's a delight for me to receive in Singapore, to deliver the keynote address at the 20th Shangri-La Dialogue, the Prime Minister of Australia. My supervisor, when I was studying for my DPhil at Oxford on French foreign policy in Africa, of all things, was the renowned Australian scholar Hedley Bull. He had authored the classic international-relations work *The Anarchical Society*, a title he would probably again choose if he were alive today and able to write on contemporary strategic issues.

My first job was given to me by the then Australian director of the IISS Professor Robert O'Neill, who sadly died in April of this year, but did so much when at the IISS to move the Institute's ship beyond its North Atlantic bearings and drop anchor from time to time in other parts of the world, notably in Asia. Those fine Australians, along with many others of their generation like Professor Coral Bell, did much to teach a younger generation of analysts during the 1980s how to think strategically.

The IISS is committed through its Southeast Asian Young Leaders' Programme to recruit the best regional researchers of the successor generation. I still pass on to young analysts at the IISS the most important thing Hedley Bull taught me, which he summarised in a tidy epigram: thinking is also research. I conclude from the two inspirational persons I have cited, one Singaporean, one Australian, that finding the right balance between thinking and giving it a go is the task of all strategists, whether civilian or military, political or commercial.